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Kirsten L. Kolstrup

‘You’re not in charge here’: Negotiations of control and connection in a binational stepfamily¹

Abstract: This article explores the interactional processes of a binational stepfamily in Denmark. Following Bourdieu (1977), it is argued that in stepfamily interaction, negotiations of legitimacy precede, overlap and become intertwined with negotiations of control and connection. In previous studies conducted in interactional linguistics and linguistic anthropology, the control and connection dimensions have been found to provide a useful framework for studying family interaction (Blum-Kulka 1997; Dedaic 2001; Tannen 2001, 2007; Marinova 2007; Gordon 2009). This paper builds upon these studies, which focus primarily on the interaction in intact nuclear families, to consider stepfamilies. In addition, the family analysed includes a stepparent who is not fully proficient in the language spoken in the family, which adds yet another dimension of complexity. What the interactional analysis of data collected from a binational stepfamily reveals is that legitimacy serves as an often overlooked precursor for control and connection manoeuvres in family interaction and that linguistic alignment can occur despite disagreement on issues of legitimacy.

Keywords: binationalism, family interaction, stepfamilies, alignment, legitimacy

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1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, Denmark, like most other Western countries, has witnessed two significant developments influencing family relations: the divorce rate has risen and an increasing number of Danish citizens have married foreign nationals

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(Olsen *et al.* 2005). These two societal trends have broadened the concept of the traditional nuclear monolingual family to include a multicultural aspect and a wide range of stepfamily arrangements. The growing acceptance of these new family structures in Denmark is mirrored by the advent of vocabulary such as the positively valenced ‘bonus-’ prefix (for instance *bonusfar* – ‘bonus-dad’). However, even though the term ‘bonus’ has more positive connotations than ‘step’, research on stepfamilies shows that the process of becoming a stepfamily is by no means easy or straightforward (Burrell 1995; Levin 1997a, 1997b; Ganong & Coleman 2004).

While the field of stepfamily formation has been recognised within family studies, it has not yet received significant attention within interactional linguistics and linguistic anthropology. Much of the research on interaction in intact nuclear families (Blum-Kulka 1997; Tannen 2001, 2007; Marinova 2007; Gordon 2009) is based on Tannen’s framework (2001, 2007), who has suggested two dimensions as critically important in family interaction, namely control and connection.

However, as this paper demonstrates, when these concepts are used to analyse a binational stepfamily, the control and connection dimensions are often insufficient and need to be augmented by an explicit awareness of the family members’ legitimacy as speakers (Bourdieu 1977). Family members need to perceive each other as having ‘the right to speech’ and the ‘power to impose reception’ (Bourdieu 1977: 648). The positioning of each other as legitimate speakers on family matters is thus a necessary precursor for the negotiations of control and connection. The centrality of legitimacy is still relatively unrecognised, or at best implicit, in interactional linguistic research on families and stepfamilies (Varenne 1992; Blum-Kulka 1997; Lee 1997; Tannen 2001, 2007; Gordon 2003, 2009); with the exception of Dedaic (2001). It is, however, commonly recognised in research on stepfamilies in the area of family studies (Burrell 1995; Levin 1997a, 1997b; Ganong & Coleman 2004).

By exploring the interactional processes of a binational stepfamily in Denmark, this paper not only integrates these two areas of research but also considers how language proficiency impacts on stepfamily interaction; thereby drawing attention to factors which have not received much attention in previous linguistic research on family interaction.

2 Theoretical background

Previous studies of family interaction (Varenne 1992; Blum-Kulka 1997; Gordon 2009) regard each family as ‘its own world’ (Gordon 2009: 6), while emphasis-

ing the processes of group formation in contrast to presumptions regarding pre-existing ‘types of families’. Certainly, families and stepfamilies can be usefully described as legally-structured kinds of social configurations. However, the interactional processes constituting different families are exceptionally diverse and applying ‘prefabricated’ definitions can result in reductionist and even misleading categorical framing. This perspective on processes of family formation has been inspired by Thorne who, following Latour (2005, in Thorne 2011), argues that the term ‘community’ is typically indexical of a sociological abstraction. Thorne notes that relying upon such static notions unnecessarily and potentially reductionistically draw the focus away from the actual, real-time processes of community formation (see also Duff 2007). A potential value of focusing on processes of family formation, rather than working from a predefined understanding of ‘types of families’, is that any kind of social configuration, family or otherwise, can be empirically explored as ‘processes of “doing” communication, alignment, contestation, solidarity building, disagreement, establishing and repairing intersubjectivity’ (Thorne 2011: 305). Essential to these processes is the simultaneous positioning of self and others in the ongoing production of self in interaction (Davies & Harré 1990: 48). In previous research on stepfamily interaction, Goffman’s concept of alignment (1981) has also proved to be a useful tool in the revelation of how family members team up to speak as one in, for instance, parenting and telling a story (Gordon 2003), and how misalignments can occur when two generations argue (Lee 1997). However, while the concepts of positioning and alignment are used in the present study to reveal the foundational processes behind family formation, these concepts are not explicitly concerned with the more specific negotiations of control and connection, which are the focus in this article.

In a series of publications that examine everyday family interaction Tannen (2001, 2007) argues that in any conversation the participants need to find ‘the right position between hierarchy and equality as well as between closeness and distance’ (2001: 71). These dichotomies make up two continua with intersecting axes where hierarchy and equality constitute the oppositions on the ‘control continuum’, and closeness and distance constitute the oppositions on the ‘connection continuum’. Tannen (2007) claims that previous studies on family conversations have focused too one-sidedly on the control dimension (e.g. Watts 1991; Varenne 1992). She finds evidence of negotiation of both control and connection while arguing that conversational turns can be both ambiguous and polysemic. This means that every utterance which attempts to exercise control simultaneously connects – and vice versa (Tannen 2007: 29). Typically, control manoeuvres are characterised as utterances intended, or experienced as intended, to get another participant to change his or her actions, while connec-

tion manoeuvres are utterances intended, or perceived to be intended, as bringing the interlocutors closer together.

To illustrate, in an analysis of a conversation between husband and wife, Tannen (2007) shows how a request can entail elements of both control and connection. When Janet asks her husband Steve to copy and send off a credit card application, she mixes control manoeuvres – such as telling him in detail what to do – and connection manoeuvres – for instance, using family-specific nicknames. In this way, Tannen argues, Janet is trying to control Steve's actions and, at the same time, signal their connection by using terms of endearment.

Other studies have argued for similar dichotomies in the analysis of family talk, such as 'respect' and 'familiarity' (Geertz 1989) and 'power' and 'solidarity' (Blum-Kulka 1997). In one part of her analysis, Blum-Kulka focuses on the intertwining of power and solidarity through 'social control acts' (Blum-Kulka 1997: 142–179), in which she explores the direct style parents use when addressing their children. She finds that 71.5 percent of all parental control acts were directly phrased (1997: 148), but adds that 45 percent of these directives were mitigated to soften the coerciveness of the control act (*ibid.*: 149). Blum-Kulka argues that the direct and mitigated direct use of social control acts illustrates the asymmetric power relations between parents and children (control), while also fostering informality and intimacy (connection).

These studies point to the control and connection dimensions as central to the interactional processes and community formation in intact nuclear families. Yet communication in binational stepfamilies remains largely unexplored. A notable exception is Dedaic's study (2001), which analyses a teenage stepdaughter's positioning of herself and her stepmother in dinner conversations and also finds evidence of the complex relationship between control and connection. For instance, the stepdaughter frequently engages in one-upmanship while simultaneously indicating closeness and solidarity towards her stepmother. But Dedaic's findings go beyond the control and connection framework to demonstrate how the stepdaughter's positioning of her stepmother simultaneously involves strategies of inclusion and exclusion. Dedaic argues that these strategies provide evidence for the role confusion often evident in stepfamilies.

Her findings are echoed in family studies on stepfamily communication, which discuss how disciplining (control) and closeness (connection) issues between stepparent and stepchildren often lead to conflict because of role confusion (Burrell 1995; Levin 1997a, 1997b; Ganong & Coleman 2004). This confusion is related to the stepparent's say in matters concerning the stepchild. For instance, Levin (1997a) describes the case of Roger and Ruth, a father and a stepmother, noting: 'When a decision is made regarding his children, Roger contacts his former wife. Ruth is not included in special arrangements where

Roger's children are in focus. At the same time, Ruth is the caring person at home that prepares food for the children, washes their clothes, etc.' (1997a: 129). In this case, the stepmother is a legitimate speaker in the family when it comes to caring for the children within the home but an illegitimate speaker when it comes to decisions outside of it.

What these studies appear to indicate is that legitimacy can function as a precursor for possible control and connection manoeuvres available to stepparents. This finding is confirmed by Bourdieu, who emphasises that 'speech presupposes a legitimate transmitter addressing a legitimate receiver, one who is recognized and recognizing' (1977: 649). Thus, interlocutors' mutual recognition of each other as legitimate speakers and listeners is essential in all human communication, but often runs the risk of being ignored because of how it is embedded within the social context.

In the present study I first analyse an extract from an informal interview I conducted with a stepmother in a binational family, which illustrates that being considered a legitimate speaker is a precursor for a stepparent to participate in negotiations of control and connection in family matters. This is followed by an analysis of family conversations which explores real-time processes of positioning and alignment in family formation through the application of Tannen's control and connection framework. Each of the analysed extracts reveals how the stepmother's limited legitimacy as a family member impacts on the negotiations of control and connection. Moreover, the stepmother's status as a second language speaker is highlighted as it further complicates the interaction within the family.

3 Stepfamily negotiations: Control, connection, and legitimacy

3.1 Participants and data

The focus of the present study is on Mulenga, a stepmother in a Zambian–Danish stepfamily.² Mulenga is 32 years old, has a secretarial college degree, and left her job at a lawyer's office as well as a large family when she came to Denmark. Her mother tongue is Bemba, one of the most widely-spoken lan-

² The data used in this study is part of a large scale project called: *Læring og integration. Voksne og dansk som andetsprog* ['Learning and integration. Adults and Danish as a second language'] (see Wagner 2006).

guages in Zambia, and she speaks English fluently, as it is the official language in Zambia. She came to Denmark in the autumn of 2004 to marry a Danish man, John, who is 18 years her senior and works in the Danish navy.

While it is Mulenga's first marriage, it is John's third, and he has a child from each previous marriage. The eldest is grown up while the youngest, 9-year-old Emma, stays primarily with her biological mother. However, John has shared custody, and Emma spends 2–4 days every other week with John and Mulenga. Emma speaks Danish only, while the language used between John and Mulenga is English. Mulenga takes an intensive Danish course of 3½ hours, 4 days a week. At the time of the first recording in October 2005, she had just passed level 1 at the local language centre.

The excerpts analysed in this paper come from a set of data consisting of an interview between Mulenga and myself and 12 recordings taken on 5 days between September 2005 and February 2006. Mulenga was in charge of the recordings featuring the three family members' interaction.

3.2 'You're not in charge here'

The following excerpt is from a recorded semi-structured interview I conducted with Mulenga in my office at the university. While the interview focused on her situation in Denmark and language learning history, Mulenga also talked about the struggles she faces when trying to become a part of her new family. The recording was taken when Mulenga had lived in Denmark for 10 months, which was 2 months after I first met her. Prior to the start of excerpt (1), she had expressed her concerns about her linguistic difficulties understanding what Emma says, and her concerns about the relationship with Emma in general.

(1)

1. MUL: sometimes she [Emma] would always say things like, you know, she
2. didn't know how to take you, sometimes she'd say, 'no, you're not in
3. charge here, my dad is'
4. KIR: yeah I know
5. MUL: and, I'd be you know hurt about that. And sometimes my husband would
6. laugh about it, and I said, 'no, you should tell her that', 'cause I
7. don't feel good if somebody tells me that, but you should tell it to
8. her in a nice way that, yeah, she's older than you and, if she tells
9. you to, not to do this, or not to jump on the sofa or not to do crazy
10. things that would hurt you then, you have to listen to us. So
11. KIR: he said that to her?
12. MUL: yeah, after I told him that you have to go tell her that, otherwise, I
13. have to feel like I'm part of this family too

((3 lines are omitted))

17. I don't think I'm an evil stepmother ()
18. KIR: no, not at all
19. MUL: I think if she really wants, if I had a chance to really, go out with
20. her and do things with her, but, I somehow sense the mother doesn't
21. trust that. And, I think I've given up wanting to be really close

When Emma tells Mulenga *you're not in charge here, my dad is* (l. 2–3), she explicitly positions her as an illegitimate speaker in the family community. John supports Emma's exclusion of Mulenga through laughter (l. 6). To Mulenga, being excluded is painful: *I'd be hurt (...) about that* (l. 5) and *I don't feel good if somebody tells me that* (l. 6–7). In her plea to John, *you should tell her [Emma] that* (l. 6), she shows awareness of the hierarchy which exists in the family, positioning John as possessing greater power than she has in matters of discipline and instruction. Her request to John explicitly addresses the necessity of him supporting her position as a legitimate speaker on family matters, which would enable Mulenga to conduct control and connection manoeuvres in the family. In short, for her to participate as a legitimate family member, she needs John's endorsement. She reports telling him to say to Emma that *she's older than you and, if she tells you to, not to do this* (l. 8–9), *you have to listen to us* (l. 10). Without this support, Mulenga is unable to conduct control manoeuvres; she is not positioned as an adult who can instruct and discipline Emma but as an interloper who does not have legitimacy. Her wish to be included in negotiations of control could also be interpreted as a connection manoeuvre, since it aims to establish a family community where she, too, feels good (l. 6–7). Her desire to have a more intimate connection with her stepdaughter is further explained in lines 19–20: *if I had a chance to really, go out with her and do things with her*. But, at the same time, she gives up in advance, saying: *I somehow sense the mother doesn't trust that. And, I think I've given up wanting to be really close* (l. 20–21). Her reference to Emma's biological mother shows yet another dimension of the gatekeeping mechanisms that Mulenga faces as she attempts to be included in the family.

Mulenga's retelling of the incidents and her utterance *I have to feel like I'm part of this family too* (l. 13) demonstrate her awareness of how important it is that both Emma and John perceive her as a legitimate speaker in the family. Mulenga's legitimacy in the family would allow her to develop the relationship she wishes to have with Emma, namely one in which she could both discipline (control) Emma as a (co)parent and also be sociable (connect) with her.

The concerns expressed by Mulenga in the interview are substantiated by the analysis of family interactions that have been recorded in the home.

Extracts from three such interactions show that Mulenga attempts to create alignment with Emma through negotiations of control and connection, and in all three of them, Emma rebuffs her attempts and resists granting her legitimacy. This reveals how these more or less implicit negotiations of legitimacy function as a precursor for negotiations of control and connection between Mulenga and Emma. Moreover, Mulenga's status as a second language speaker adds yet another layer of complexity; while she is at risk of being excluded from full participation in the family, she simultaneously needs support as a second language speaker.

3.3 This is not a 'navy camp': Negotiation of the use of directives

In the following excerpt, the balance between control and connection becomes the explicit target of negotiation, when Mulenga challenges John's way of addressing Emma by positioning herself as an adult family member who has a say in the parenting of Emma. As pointed out by Blum-Kulka, the use of direct requests, such as imperatives, is common in families at dinner time (1997: 152). A pattern is also prominent when John addresses Emma. For instance, in a 30-minute recording during dinner, John uses directives with Emma on 11 occasions. Eight of these are direct with no mitigation such as: *Emma sæt dig nu ned* ('Emma sit down now'). Mulenga does not normally comment on John's instructions but nearing the end of the dinner, after 23 minutes and 8 directives in which John sounds increasingly irritated, the following exchange occurs:

(2)

667. JOH: *Emma sæt dig ned og spis din mad*
'Emma sit you down and eat your food'
668. MUL: *°du skal ikke (sidde der)°*
'you must not sit there'
669. (2.5)
670. JOH: *hvad skal jeg ikke?*
'what must I not'
671. MUL: *(°du skal tag°) (0.8) °kan du: kan du sidde° (0.8) og spise*
'you have (to) take can you can you sit and eat'
672. (2.1)
673. JOH: *jamen jeg har sagt det [(.) ti gange*
'yes but I have said it ten times'
674. MUL: [det er det er ikke: øh (.) ()]
'it is it is not uh
675. JOH: ts: ((brief laughter))

706. JOH: [ja ((squeaky))
‘yes’
707. EMM: gegegugugugugu[gu: ((makes baby sounds))

When John tells Emma ‘sit you down and eat your food’ (l. 667), he is simultaneously exerting control, aiming at getting Emma to change her behaviour, and building connection, making the family sit together. His request is formulated in the most direct form, without mitigation, using the imperatives ‘sit’ and ‘eat’. There is no verbal response from Emma, which is also the case in other parts of the conversation where John’s orders to Emma go unnoticed or unremarked upon by the other two participants. In this excerpt, however, his order to Emma is followed by a quiet utterance by Mulenga (l. 668), which is barely audible and makes John ask for repetition: ‘what must I not?’ (l. 670). Mulenga continues using the interrogative formulation ‘can you’ (l. 671) to demonstrate how she thinks he should speak to Emma. Her turn thus challenges how John balances control and connection in addressing Emma. By aligning with Emma, Mulenga is positioning herself as her advocate and simultaneously positioning Emma as an independent individual who should be spoken to more politely. Thus, Mulenga exerts both control – aiming at making John change his way of addressing Emma – and connection, because her utterance serves the purpose of trying to make the tone amongst family members more polite and less asymmetrical.

But there seems to be more than negotiation of control and connection going on in these first lines of the excerpt. Mulenga takes the floor (l. 668) with a very softly spoken utterance. While it could be interpreted as linguistic insecurity, Mulenga does not speak quietly in the recording prior to the excerpt. The more plausible interpretation of her quiet utterance is that she is positioning herself as somebody who has a say in Emma’s disciplining, an area in which she is normally not included. The quietness of her utterance might thus hint at uncertainty about the reception of her interference.

John’s response to Mulenga’s utterance is defensive in terms of how he speaks to Emma, challenging her critique, but he does not dismiss Mulenga as an illegitimate speaker. Mulenga interrupts John and draws on John’s role at his workplace, ‘this is not (...) navy camp’ (l. 674, 676), thus indirectly comparing his way of addressing his daughter to the way he addresses subordinates in the navy. Her argument can again be considered both a control manoeuvre – trying to get John to change his behaviour – and a connection manoeuvre – using humour resulting in laughter by both John and Emma (l. 677, 679). It is not clear why Emma laughs, but I interpret it as a way of aligning with her father for two reasons. First, it is unlikely that she understands the English

phrase ‘navy camp’. In addition, the interactional data indicate a clear pattern whereby Emma aligns with her father at the first hint of disagreement between Mulenga and John. Still, at this point, neither John nor Emma explicitly exclude Mulenga from discussing the subject, which might be why Mulenga continues her argument against John, aligning with Emma as an adult who speaks up for her.

In line 688, Mulenga’s aim to make John change his behaviour becomes more explicit: ‘she is a big girl so you must speak’. She no longer speaks quietly and she addresses John with the 2nd person pronoun: *you*. However, John interrupts Mulenga again and with a distinct articulation defends the way he addresses Emma: ‘yes but, if she is a big girl ...’ (l. 689–692). Although he refers to Emma by using the 3rd person pronoun *she*, the fact that he sticks to Danish points to his utterance being directed at Emma, while the distinct articulation ensures that Mulenga can also follow his argument. Through his articulation, he not only includes Mulenga in the conversation, but he also aligns with her linguistically, providing her with the support she needs to follow the conversation. Interestingly, at the same time, his utterance positions him as disagreeing with Mulenga in terms of Emma’s maturity while positioning Emma as not being a ‘big girl’.

Emma immediately takes up John’s argument by challenging the number of times he has told her to sit down and eat: ‘you have only said it five times’ (l. 693), while leaving his positioning of her as not being ‘a big girl’ unchallenged. Her utterance leads to a short childish discussion (ll. 693–695), which renders Mulenga’s original point lost. John quickly pulls out of the discussion and both he and Mulenga remain silent while Emma laughs and tries to continue the childish conversation (l. 695, 701). In Mulenga’s last utterance, ‘yeah sometimes she is baby John’ (l. 705), she abandons her advocacy for Emma and aligns with John by explicitly addressing him, mentioning his name and referring to Emma in the 3rd person. But in spite of John being the explicit recipient of the utterance, it is clear that the intended receiver is Emma. Not only because Mulenga’s utterance is in Danish, but also because of Emma’s response to her utterance imitating baby sounds (l. 707). In this last sentence, Mulenga shows her disapproval of Emma’s behaviour by shifting her alignment from Emma to John.

This shift in alignment can be viewed both as a control and connection manoeuvre. Her alignment with John is a control manoeuvre positioning herself as a co-parent who disciplines Emma, but it is also a connection manoeuvre because it tells Emma that she will only stay on her side if she behaves well.

This analysis demonstrates a micro-development in Mulenga’s positioning of herself, from alignment with Emma, to alignment with John. But the analysis also suggests that there is more to this interaction than just control and connec-

tion manoeuvres. What is readily apparent is Mulenga's awareness of her risk of being excluded in the negotiation of family matters. It becomes evident in her initial, indirect way of addressing John's manner of speaking to Emma. When she is accepted as a legitimate speaker on the matter, she expands upon her argument and becomes more explicit in her involvement and suggestions. This is not the sole instance when the issue of legitimacy is manifest, as becomes clear when Mulenga, Emma and John negotiate the question of gender.

3.4 'Tom and Jerry': Resisting connection through negotiations of gender

On one occasion, Mulenga recorded more than two hours during the afternoon, dinner and after-dinner activities of the family. All five recordings provide evidence of Mulenga trying to get Emma to align with her through their shared gender. While Mulenga tries to align via essentialist interpretations of femininity, Emma consistently rejects Mulenga's positioning of the two of them in a group excluding John, by either including him or positioning herself as 'not girly' and thus in alignment with John.

In the following excerpt, the family have finished dinner and Mulenga is giving Emma a manicure while Emma watches cartoons. Right before the start of the excerpt, John tells Emma not to watch cartoons during the manicure because he thinks it will prevent her from enjoying it. Mulenga takes Emma's side by telling John that women can focus on multiple things at once, which receives no audible response from Emma. After this discussion, Mulenga focuses her attention on Emma watching the cartoon, *Tom and Jerry*:

(3)

264. MUL: *Jerry er en lille t- mus ikke?*
'Jerry is a little mouse right'
265. EMM: *ja*
'yes'
266. (1.0)
267. MUL: *ja hun er meget [dygtig]*
'yes she is very good'
268. EMM: [jeg kan sige To- Tom og Jerry på engelsk
'I can say Tom and Jerry in English']
269. MUL: *jeg tæn[ker]*
'I think'
270. EMM: [Tom and Jerry]
271. MUL: *jeg tænker Tom er en mand og Jerry er en kvinde fordi (0.8) Jerry*
'I think Tom is a man and Jerry is a woman because Jerry

295. MUL: *du lyder som din far nu*
 'you sound like your dad now'
296. EMM: ((short laughter)) *jeg har* (0.4) [JEG KAN IKKE LIDE at få manicure
 'I have I don't like getting a manicure'
297. MUL: [ne:j Emma
 'no Emma'
298. EMM: *jeg kan ku- jeg kan godt lide de f- f- hæ[n]der jeg har=*
 'I can I like the hands I have'
299. MUL: [()]
300. EMM: *=jeg har fået det fra min far af*
 'I have got it from my dad'
301. JOH: *nej det- jeg kan da godt lide at få manicure*
 'no that I like getting manicure'
302. (1.5)
303. MUL: *men det er mange kvinder der arbejder som mechanic* (0.7) or
 'but there are many women who work as a mechanic or
 304. engineer hm?'

In the first half of the excerpt (ll. 264–284), Mulenga attempts to create an alignment with Emma through a series of connection manoeuvres in which she positions Emma and herself as women, in opposition to John as a man. But Emma resists this alignment with Mulenga. The excerpt starts with a connection manoeuvre in which Mulenga initiates a conversation with Emma about the cartoon she is watching: *Jerry is a little mouse right?* (l. 264). Emma willingly participates in the conversation by saying that she can say Tom and Jerry in English (ll. 268, 270). Mulenga, however, does not show any interest in Emma's offer of linguistic alignment. Instead, she indirectly describes Jerry as a woman by using the pronoun *she* (l. 267), followed by an explicit reference to Jerry as a woman: *I think Tom is a man and Jerry is a woman* (l. 271). In both instances her argument for thinking that Jerry is a woman is that she considers Jerry *good* (*dygtig*, also meaning clever, talented and competent). According to this logic, women are positioned as good in opposition to men as *not good*. Thus, Mulenga attempts to align with Emma based on gender and thereby excludes John. Mulenga's laughter (l. 272) suggests the joking nature of her argument. Emma agrees with Mulenga but immediately includes *some men* (l. 274) and more specifically, *my dad* (l. 276) as also being good. Thus, Emma rejects Mulenga's attempt to connect via exclusion when she insists on including John. Her use of the possessive pronoun *my*, stressing her family-bond with her biological father, further points to her exclusion of Mulenga. Emma elaborates on her argument: *there are certain things ladies can't do and certain things men can't do* (l. 278), with which John agrees: *that's right Emma* (l. 279). By countering Mulenga's good/bad gender binary, he positions himself and Emma in align-

ment with each other, which also has the effect of excluding Mulenga. Emma's appreciation of her alignment with John is evident in her short laughter (ll. 281, 296).

Thus, the initial alignment and connection which Mulenga attempted to create with Emma has been rejected by Emma, who has now included John as 'good'. However, in the second part of the excerpt (ll. 286–304), the negotiation takes a new turn when Emma attempts to exclude Mulenga and align with John. This is rejected by both John and Mulenga, who position themselves as adults, in opposition to Emma.

When Emma positions men as being able to repair cars and women as being good at manicures (ll. 281–284), Mulenga responds by asking: *your dad told you about that?* (ll. 288–289). She further tells Emma *you sound like your dad now* (l. 295), while seeking John's assistance in finding the expression *you sound* (ll. 292–295). At this point Emma and John have created an alignment in positions excluding Mulenga, but as was already evident in section 3.3, the disagreement does not prevent John from aligning with Mulenga linguistically. In other words, Mulenga is simultaneously misaligned positionally but aligned linguistically. In this excerpt, the linguistic support consists of John helping her find vocabulary. Emma continues positioning herself in alignment with John, resisting connection and alignment with Mulenga by claiming *I don't like getting a manicure* (l. 296). She takes her position even further away from Mulenga – and towards John – by pointing to her hands as a physical resemblance of her dad's hands: *I like the hands I have* (l. 298), *I have gotten it [them] from my dad* (l. 300). But when John rejects Emma's positioning of him as someone who does not like manicures, *I like getting manicure* (l. 301), he places Emma in a dilemma. Emma has pitched categories for men and women linking them with certain actions and objects: women and manicures on the one hand, and men and cars on the other. Furthermore, she positions herself as not being part of the 'women' category – in an apparent effort to align with her father – by claiming that she does not like manicures. However, John resists Emma's positioning of him and thereby challenges her. Mulenga then re-aligns with John and thereby also challenges Emma's categorisation by saying *but there are many women who work as mechanic or engineer* (l. 303). Thus, in her attempt to avoid being positioned with Mulenga, Emma suddenly finds herself misaligned with her father.

In this excerpt, Mulenga's attempts to connect with Emma are followed by a lengthy and dynamic negotiation of exclusion and inclusion, which is characterised by processes of alignment, resistance and rejection between Emma, Mulenga and John. The analysis of the processes gives an insight into which positions Mulenga can suggest for herself, Emma and John respectively. It

also illustrates which positions facilitate Mulenga being considered a legitimate speaker, or co-parent, by Emma. Emma accepts Mulenga's positioning of herself if the group formation includes John, but if Mulenga positions Emma and herself as allies in opposition to John, Emma resists.

Of course, John's presence during the two conversations analysed influences the positioning strategies and alignments of all three participants. In both instances the negotiations start with Mulenga attempting to align and create a connection with Emma. Furthermore, in both instances Emma resists, which results in Mulenga choosing alignment with John. But, as will be seen in the next section, this is altered when John is not present.

3.5 'Santa Lucia': Collaborating but disagreeing

In excerpt (4), Mulenga and Emma are alone in the kitchen. Prior to the excerpt Mulenga asks Emma about dance lessons that she has been taking and Emma talks about the upcoming Santa Lucia procession, an annual tradition for many schools in Denmark. The two of them briefly dance and sing Santa Lucia together, and Mulenga asks Emma about the procession details, which Emma provides willingly, until she declares that she is not going to participate in the Santa Lucia procession because she finds it boring (l. 188–189):

(4)

188. EMM: *jeg gider ikke om øh at øhm: gå Santa Lucia*
'I don't want to uh to uhm walk Santa Lucia'
189. EMM: *>jeg synes det er kedeligt<*
'I think it's boring'
190. MUL: *ne:j Emma*
'no Emma'
191. EMM: *johov*
'yeaheah'
192. (1.3)
193. MUL: *det er ikke rigtig*
'that is not true'
194. EMM: *jo*
'yes (it is)'
195. (2.1)
196. MUL: *jeg tænker du ska:l (0.6) lave ma:nge ting (0.4) om: (.) ø:h (.)*
'I think you will do many things about uh
197. (*daje*) *da var (.) da: (1.3) da du e:r (.) en: (.) junge junge⁴ (.)*
when was when when you are a

4 'Junge' and 'jång' in lines 197, 199 are not actual words in Danish.

198. *pi-*
 gir-'
199. EMM: *ˈjɑŋg° (.) ung*
 'young'
200. MUL: *ung (0.5) ung børn (0.4) du skal lave mange mange ting (0.4)*
 'young young children you must do many many things
201. *og så du-*
 and then you'
202. EMM: *jeg gider ikke [at s()]*
 'I don't want to
203. MUL: [m- *da: du blive:r øh tra:- tredive*
 'when you turn uh thirty
204. =*du h[ar: (.) meget meget [s: ø:h (1.0) har lavet mange ting*
 'you have a lot a lot uh have done many things
205. EMM: [°æ:j° [*ups* ((not directed at Mulenga))
 'æj ((annoyance)) woops
206. EMM: *ja ((high pitch))*
 'yes'
207. MUL: *ja ((high pitch))*
 'yes'
208. (1.9)
209. MUL: *jeg syntes (.) så*
 'I think so'

Mulenga's argument about the importance of the Santa Lucia procession: *I think you will [should] do many things when you are a young children* [child] (ll. 196–200), is, as we have seen in other fragments of this family's interactions, simultaneously a control and connection manoeuvre. As she tries to make Emma change her mind about participating (control), she also aims to bring herself and Emma closer. If Emma acquiesces in her suggestions, this might be achieved (connection). Mulenga struggles to formulate her argument, searching for words, which is evident in the many pauses (ll. 196–197). And even though Emma does not agree with what Mulenga is saying – or what Mulenga is trying to achieve interactionally – she still aligns with her linguistically by helping her find the Danish word for *young* (l. 199). Mulenga immediately picks up the word and continues her argument (l. 200). The formulation of her argument is both indirect and polite in the sense that she does not use directives to tell Emma what she should do, but rather offers an opinion on the choice she has made. The content of her argument – that she thinks children should try many different things – is dismissed by Emma (l. 202).

But Mulenga ignores Emma's attempt to dismiss her argument and continues: *when you turn thirty you have (...) done many things* (ll. 203–204). Thus, she suggests that Emma should spend her childhood having fun, otherwise she

might regret it when she gets older. Emma stops trying to argue with Mulenga but dismisses her argument again with a high pitched yes (l. 206). Mulenga rounds off the discussion by stating that she merely shares her opinion with Emma: *I think so* (l. 209). At this point, her attempt to make Emma change her mind (control) seems to have failed. But even though Emma disagrees with Mulenga and thereby resists Mulenga's self-positioning as an adult with more life experience, to whom Emma should listen, Emma aligns with Mulenga by supporting her linguistically. Her support shows that she is still engaged in the conversation and has not discounted Mulenga's legitimacy to speak, despite the fact that she rejects Mulenga's – her stepmother's – legitimacy to advise and instruct.

In a similar way to excerpts (2) and (3), this excerpt seems to end in a misalignment between Mulenga and Emma. However, the development of the negotiation is different from when John is present. Excerpts (2) and (3) end with Mulenga aligning with John, but in this fourth excerpt the outcome is not so clear. Mulenga, leaving herself vulnerable to Emma's possible rejection of her, leaves the offer of connection with Emma open. Whether Emma interprets this as an attempt to connect and whether she acts upon it is hard to judge, but an answer may be hinted at in the light of how the recording continues. As it proceeds, Mulenga changes the subject, asking Emma what she wants for Christmas. Emma replies with 'a teddy bear or an African necklace', which is a clear alignment and connection manoeuvre towards Mulenga, who often wears African accessories.

The legitimacy issue in excerpt (4) is not explicit in the sense that Emma does not exclude Mulenga as a legitimate speaker on the topic. However, Mulenga's suggestions and arguments (ll. 196–204) are indirect and polite which might be indicative of Mulenga being aware of the risk that Emma may not accept her advice.

4 Conclusion

By applying Tannen's control and connection framework (2001, 2007) to a binational stepfamily, I have shown that the negotiations of control and connection in a stepfamily also need to consider whether or not the family members regard each other as legitimate speakers. On the whole, the data suggest that legitimacy is a precursor for the possible control and connection manoeuvres that Mulenga, as a stepmother, can make in the family, especially towards Emma.

This issue is addressed explicitly in the narrative data (excerpt [1]), in which Mulenga reflects on issues related to control, connection and, not least, her

legitimacy as a family member. The analysis of the three interactional fragments demonstrates how processes of legitimacy take different forms, from subtle to explicit, and how they shape the interactional possibilities that a stepmother has at her disposal. Examples of subtle negotiations of legitimacy were shown in sections 3.3 and 3.5; evidenced by Mulenga's quiet utterances and indirect arguments. In section 3.4, exclusion took a more explicit form when Emma resisted alignment with Mulenga. The most explicit form of Emma's exclusion of Mulenga was seen in section 3.2, when Mulenga recounts how Emma says *you're not in charge here*. Based on these findings, it appears that researchers should pay greater attention to the role legitimacy serves. It is an – often overlooked – precursor for control and connection manoeuvres in family interaction.

In stepfamilies, the issue of legitimacy is often explicit (Burrell 1995; Levin 1997a, 1997b; Dedaic 2001; Ganong & Coleman 2004). However, legitimacy in stepfamilies takes different forms, depending on how long the stepfamily has been a unit, whether the biological parents have shared custody, and so forth. Unfortunately, within family studies research there is a tendency to group stepfamilies into a limited number of patterns (Burrell 1995; Levin 1997a). Such *a priori* conceptualisations of families and stepfamilies run the risk of eclipsing the dynamics and complexity unique to each family being studied. This article, along with Varenne (1992), Blum-Kulka (1997) and Gordon (2009), suggests that 'families' might be better conceptualised, researched and understood as social configurations that are formed, changed and achieved in and through the processes of interaction.

The analysis has further shown how Emma and John, as the fluent language users, face choices of alignment when interacting with the non-fluent language user, Mulenga, during negotiations of control and connection. Their linguistic alignment was expressed through prosodic features such as John's clear articulation, in excerpt (2) (ll. 689–692), enabling Mulenga to follow; help with vocabulary, in excerpt (3), when Mulenga briefly switches to English (l. 294) to ask for the right expression in Danish; and correction, in excerpt (4), when Emma corrects Mulenga's pronunciation of *young* (l. 199). Interestingly, in all three cases of linguistic alignment, the fluent language users simultaneously misalign with the non-fluent language user in terms of the argument or connection manoeuvre she is trying to accomplish. This kind of complexity is engendered by trying to position oneself in roles which are, at times, seemingly incompatible – trying to exercise control and connection as a stepmother while simultaneously needing support as a second language learner – and it points to the need for conceptual flexibility in future studies. The contemporary family unit is increasingly 'non-traditional', which means we need to be attentive to

how different socio-cultural factors impact on the negotiations of connection and control.

Bionote

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